



Meeting of V4 Ministers

(2 February) The engagement of troops from the Visegrad Group countries in the Baltics and the areas of V4 cooperation on NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) were the main issues on the agenda of the V4 Defence Ministers' meeting in Poland's Niepolomice. Poland is the current holder of the V4 Presidency. Among its priorities are the delivery of a collective strengthening of NATO's eastern borders, the stand-up of a joint battlegroup (V4 EU BG), and the provision of support to joint exercises and training.

During the talks, SVK Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš reassured his colleagues of a continuing interest in deepening V4 cooperation, especially at a time when Europe is faced with a number of crises. "We welcome measures aimed at strengthening NATO's eastern borders, we have been part of them after all," he said. The Minister went on to remind that the V4 countries are joining Allied efforts by deploying their troops to the Baltics on a three-month rotational basis. The SVK Armed Forces will take on their role in Latvia in the second quarter of this year. He called on his partners to evaluate their lessons learned from the deployments to the Baltics once they were completed, and to discuss the V4's potential future involvement in stepping up the so-called enhanced Forward Presence (eFP).

On another joint initiative by the V4 countries – the V4 EU BG, Peter Gajdoš said: "I am pleased that expert level talks have begun on another joint V4 EU BG, which will be on stand-by in 2019. This is an important political message we are sending to our Allies. The added value for us is joint training, regular meetings and coordination of our activities. At the same time, we should bear in mind the significance of the certification exercise and our efforts to enhance the compatibility of our militaries." According to Minister Gajdoš, the continuity of the battlegroup project may well result in the stand-up of a V4 Permanent Modular Force (V4 PMF), which will be deployable on NATO and EU operations and missions as well as on domestic crisis management operations.

During the meeting, the Czech Republic put forward a suggestion to the current Polish V4 Presidency to organise a meeting in Brussels of the V4 Ministers of Defence with the new United States Secretary of Defence, Mr James Mattis. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Ministers signed a joint communiqué where they reaffirmed their interest in pressing on with the projects under development.

Parliament endorses deployment

(2 February) The members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic have endorsed the deployment of 152 service personnel on a training mission to Latvia. Slovakia will thus deliver on its commitment made at the NATO Summit in Warsaw last year. Slovak troops will be engaged in the Baltics in the second quarter of 2017 as part of the Visegrad Group's joint training mission. They will join the measures to strengthen the Alliance's collective defence on NATO's eastern borders alongside the other Allied forces who have already been or are soon to be active in the region. Given that the training will be directed towards developing the interoperability of Allied armed forces, Slovak service personnel will put their capabilities to the test as well. Slovak troops will be engaged in the Baltics from April through June 2017. The Czech Republic has already sent its troops to the Baltics for the first quarter of the year. Hungary and Poland will deploy their units in the third and fourth quarters of 2017, respectively.

- On 2 Feb, the SVK Chief of the General Staff has bid his farewell to the SVK Armed Forces personnel who are to replenish the 19th rotation of the **CZE-SVK Field Surgery Team** at the ROLE 2E Hospital in Kabul, Afghanistan. One female anaesthetist and three medical specialists make up the 3rd rotation of the Slovak medical staff to supplement the CZE Army's rotation.

- The Training Centre Lešť has been hosting a **Small-Sized Dismounted Units Basic Tactics Course in Built-up Areas**, specially designed for mechanised units from Mech Bn Levice, GBAD Bde Nitra and Goh units. The course theoretically instructs and practically trains personnel on a variety of model situations, including on the basic variants for a dynamic entry into rooms, movement along corridors, control of covered dangerous spaces, sharing of tasks among team members, as well as on the decision-making process based on an analysis of the building premises.

- The SVK Land Forces Headquarters held a change of responsibility ceremony on 30 Jan to mark the appointment of a new **Deputy Commander SVK Land Forces**. The outgoing DCOM, Brig Gen Daniel Zmeko, was replaced by the then Chief of Staff at the SVK LF HQ, General Staff (GS) Col Karol Navrátil. Brig Gen Zmeko took up the appointment of Director of the Modernisation and Infrastructure Department in the MOD, with effect from 1 February. Maj Gen Ondřej Novosad, COM SVK LF, thanked the outgoing DCOM for his pro-active approach in performance of his duties and wished him every success in his new posting.

- On 30 Jan, the SVK Armed Forces Academy Liptovský Mikuláš opened a pilot **International Staff Officers Course (ISOC)**, with English as its operational language. The course is being attended by 14 SVK Armed Forces officers. The aim of the 9-week course is to pass the expertise of operational planning on to officers, and to master the planning and conduct of military operations in compliance with NATO standards. The course will finish on 31 Mar.

- On 30 Jan, the "Maj Gen Alexander Korda" Self-Propelled Artillery Detachment was visited by Lt Col (Rtd) Jozef Bloščičák, Deputy Chairman of the Slovak Soldiers' Union – SÚB Michalovce, who came there to present Maj Stanislav Šrag, DCOM SIP Art Det, with the Union's **Memorial Plaque** for his merits in promoting the Slovak Soldiers' Union.

- Capt Miroslav Blahut, a 38-year old native of Krompachy and a graduate of the Secondary Military Specialised School and of the Military Academy Liptovský Mikuláš, assumed the appointment of Chief of the **Museum Section Svidník**, which falls under the remit of the Military History Museum Piešťany, with effect from 1 January. He was previously a technician of the Recce and Mech Coy in Trebišov, and an officer and senior logistics officer in the Trebišov-based military unit.

- On 1 Feb, Col Michal Migát, Director of the Military Police, awarded the **Military Police Medal, 1st Grade**, to Maj Oľga Šrámeková in recognition of her 26 years of service with the Military Police, as well as marking the 26th anniversary of the establishment of the SVK Military Police.

- On 31 Jan – 1 Feb, Koliňanský vrch Garrison Training Area saw a **tactical exercise involving the SVK Armed Forces members to be assigned to UNFICYP**. The exercise, attended by a 90-strong contingent, was a culmination of their three-week intense training in preparation for their deployment to perform tasks in UNFICYP in Cyprus, with the rotation date due in March 2017. It tested the capabilities, readiness and competence levels of the contingent's command staff, force protection unit and support elements to carry out missions beyond the territory of the SVK REP. Overall, the contingent under training was rated as "deployable".



Polish military decoration

(30 January) SVK Armed Forces officers Col Rudolf Pástor and Maj Igor Červený have received campaign medals, awarded by the President of the Republic of Poland, HE Mr Andrzej Duda, for their excellent accomplishment of tasks while serving alongside the Polish Contingent on Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan. They received the Star of Afghanistan from the hands of the Polish Ambassador to Slovakia, HE Mr Leszek Soczewica. The Star of Afghanistan is awarded to military and civilian personnel for their service in Afghanistan, as well as to foreign citizens for their cooperation with Polish forces during their assignment in the country.

Amendment Act heading to GOV

(1 February) Having passed through the interdepartmental review process, the Voluntary Military Training (VMT) Amendment Act 2017 was debated by the Legislative Council of the SVK Government. Subsequently, the Council has made a recommendation to the SVK GOV to express its formal agreement with the proposal. Under the new arrangements, the financial reward for voluntary soldiers will be increased by €200, the training period will be shortened from 12 to 11 weeks, and successful VMT graduates will have easier access to join the Armed Forces, the Police Corps, and the Firefighting and Rescue Services. The MOD will go ahead with the VMT training as soon as the Amendment Act has come into force, with the estimated effective date of 1 July 2017. The MOD seeks to train up to 150 voluntary soldiers annually.

Female skiers score again

(31 January) Veronika Velez-Zuzulová, of the Military Sports Centre Dukla Banská Bystrica (MSC DBB), won an excellent second place in parallel slalom at the Alpine World Cup in Sweden's Stockholm. In the finals, she lost the race with skier Mikaela Shiffrin of the United States. Petra Vrhová, another representative of the MSC DBB, took an excellent 5th place.

MOD issues public notice

(1 February) This is an advance notification by the MOD of the upcoming military convoys due to cross the territory of Slovakia in February 2017. Movements of Slovak and Allied forces will take place for the purposes of international exercises, conferences, working meetings and other military activities being conducted under the multilateral cooperation initiatives of NATO forces. The most important convoys will be escorted by the Military Police. Passing through different places and border checkpoints, a total of 22 road and 6 rail onward movements of foreign Allied forces will take place across the territory of the SVK REP well until 12 Feb. Movements of foreign Allied forces' military hardware by rail will be stepped up between 7-12 Feb.

Learning to protect convoys

(2 February) The Training Centre Lešť has been hosting a Convoy Protection Course, aimed at the members of the Transport Company (Logistics Battalion Hlohovec), as well as for the other elements of the Combat Service Support (CSS) Brigade Trenčín – Repairs Battalion Martin, Logistics Battalion Topoľčany, and CSS Battalion Prešov. The course aims to pool, maintain and project the units' capabilities to protect logistics convoys in a variety of incidents and situations. A convoy ambush will be a gruelling test as well as the culmination of their training.

Training Year 2016 results assessed and 2017 priorities discussed by SVK Armed Forces



(31 January) Chief of the General Staff of the SVK Armed Forces Gen Milan Maxim has delivered – in the presence of SVK President Andrej Kiska and Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš – an assessment of the Training Year (TY) 2016

results and informed of the 2017 priorities.

In this respect, the Minister of Defence underscored that in spite of our clearly pro-European and pro-Atlantic direction, we ourselves must, first and foremost, remain the guarantor of our own security. He went on to remind that the MOD has set out initial measures to enhance our defence capabilities in the White Paper on Defence of the Slovak Republic. In addition, it has worked out the Plan for the Use of the Armed Forces in a Time of War and submitted it to the Government for consideration.

However, our military still lacks a Long-Term Armed Forces Generation and Development Plan, which is a basic strategic document. "We need to clearly define what kind of Armed Forces we want. But above all else, we need to be able to deliver on the tasks that arise for them out of

the Constitution of the Slovak Republic and related Acts of Parliament," he said.

At the top commanders' meeting, the head of the MOD touched on important projects, such as developing the Voluntary Military Training (VMT) and the Active Reserves (ARs). After coming into office, the new MOD leadership initiated a new contracts award plan to be set forth, one taking account of the Armed Forces' existing priorities and needs. "Also thanks to using more efficient procurement methods, we have managed to save over €1 million. We will invest it back into the Armed Forces," remarked the Minister.

When it comes to the modernisation scheme, last year the main modernisation projects were further developed, primarily those catering for the needs of the SVK Armed Force; military units received delivery of another batch of Land Rover Defender Station Wagons, and Aktis and Tatra trucks; the replacement process of light infantry weapons was in progress; and deliveries of ammunition continued. On defence spending, the Minister expressed his appreciation that the 2017 defence budget has increased by €110 million, which represents a 12.4 per cent increase, and it now accounts for 1.18 per cent of GDP. In performance of our international commitments, we stood ready with the V4 EU BG as it was on "stand-by" phase in the first half of 2016,

we successfully performed the tasks of our historically first Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and the NATO Force Integration Unit Slovakia (NFIU SVK) reached Initial Operational Capability (IOC) on 1 January 2017.

During his remarks, President Andrej Kiska, Commander-in-Chief of the SVK Armed Forces, said that he was in no doubt about the patriotism of our troops earning a good reputation for Slovakia on missions abroad. He thanked them for providing assistance to civilian populations during disaster response at home. He also drew attention to the fact that they often serve with obsolete assets and equipment, which results from the MOD being overstretched financially in the long run. Gen Maxim concluded that the TY 2016 tasks were accomplished without exceptional incidents, without deaths or serious injuries on training and exercise, and without any significant damage to materiel or equipment incurred by SVK Regular Armed Forces personnel. "The most significant training activity on Slovak territory in 2016 was a series of exercises known as SLOVAK SHIELD 2016. Being part of the NATO exercises programme, it has been the largest exercise in terms of its size and objectives so far," he said. Throughout the TY 2016, SVK Armed Forces personnel also participated in high visibility drills outside of the territory of the SVK REP.